



THE MORAVIAN CATECHISM

A summary of the Christian faith, for the instruction of
confirmands and new members of the Moravian Church



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Developed by the Interprovincial Faith & Order Commission and approved
by the Northern and Southern Province Provincial Elders' Conferences
of the Moravian Church in America, 2020

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Moravian Church in America
1021 Center St., Bethlehem, PA 18018
459 S. Church St., Winston-Salem, NC 27101

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INTRODUCTION

What do Christians in the Moravian Church believe? What do candidates for confirmation and church membership affirm? Over the centuries, the Christian church has instructed potential members (new or those ready to confirm their faith) through the use of scripture and catechisms. These catechisms are summarized expositions of the **•doctrine** of the church. Like many other **•denominations**, the Moravian Church uses catechisms to instruct new members.

Catechisms have a long history within our church. The first Moravian catechism we know of is the *Questions for Children*, compiled by Luke of Prague at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The **•Ancient Unity** ranked the catechism next to the hymnal as public expression of church doctrine. In 1661, Bishop Jan Amos Comenius printed a new catechism in Amsterdam hoping to preserve the faith of his **•persecuted** church. Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf published a catechism as early as 1723. The catechism that was compiled in 1774 remained in use in various languages in different parts of the **•Worldwide Unity** for over a century. During the nineteenth century, the Moravian Church in America published a new catechism in 1848 and again in 1893. Other catechisms were published in 1937 and 1956. The 1956 version was reprinted several times until 2003; the 2003 edition had a few textual changes. In 2017, the Provincial Elders' Conferences of the Northern and Southern Provinces asked the Faith & Order Commission to provide a new catechism for the Moravian Church in North America.

This catechism is not a curriculum but can be used within a confirmation class, Sunday school, classes for new members and as a reference tool.

This catechism is intended to be a summary of the Christian faith, to be used for the instruction of confirmands and new members of the Moravian Church. This catechism is not a **•curriculum** but can be used within a confirmation class, Sunday school, classes for new members, and as a reference tool. Traditionally a catechism is written in the form of questions and answers. This catechism does not follow that format but provides the information in an expanded outline with references from Scripture (New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted), and foundational Moravian Church documents such as the *Ground of the*

Note: Definitions and further explanation of terms marked with **•bold** can be found in the Glossary beginning on page 49.

Unity (GU), Moravian Covenant for Christian Living (MCCL), Church Order of the **•Unitas Fratrum** (COUF), and liturgies and hymns from the 1995 Moravian Book of Worship (MBW).

The motto of the Moravian Church is “Our Lamb has conquered. Let us follow Him.” An important **•guiding principle** in the Moravian Church is the saying, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.” This principle is not uniquely Moravian, but it reflects the character of our tradition. We are a “Worldwide Unity,” and yet we recognize that we are not always united in the ways we worship, pray, interpret Scripture, or administer the **•Sacraments**; in the languages we speak; or the cultures in which we live.

These are all important aspects of who we are, but they are not the source or the foundation of our unity as Moravian sisters and brothers. We find our unity in the core essential beliefs that we share in common. Our unity in essential things allows us to have freedom, or liberty, in other matters that are important to people in one time or place but are not “set in stone” or required for a church or individual to be Moravian. The last four words of the principle (“in all things, love”) are very important because even when things are not “essential,” they can still be meaningful to us and we can sometimes be passionate about them. But we remember that

God’s unconditional love for us and our love for each other is greater than any of these differences. Love makes it possible for us to be united in the essentials of our faith and to move forward together in hope.

This catechism reaffirms the early Moravian concept of essentials, ministerials, and incidentals and makes it usable again for the church today.

While that guiding principle is important and helpful in living out our faith, this catechism is organized according to a similar concept that originated in the early Moravian Church. It is the concept of the essentials, ministerials, and incidentals. This catechism reaffirms this early Moravian concept and makes it usable again for the church today.

The Ancient Unity distinguished between matters that are truly essential for **•salvation**, things that are helpful and valuable in the Christian faith (ministerials), and things that are incidental to the Christian life. Moravian **•theologian** Luke of Prague distinguished between two types of essentials: the essential works of God (as creator, **•redeemer** and sustainer), and the ways we respond to God’s work (in faith, love, and hope). God’s work comes before our response, but the work of God and our response are both essential.

ESSENTIALS

If we believe and live out these essentials, then we are Christian.

On God's Part:

God **CREATES**, God **REDEEMS**,
God **SUSTAINS**

On Our Part:

We respond in **FAITH, LOVE & HOPE**

MINISTERIALS

Ministerials point us to the Essentials.

They are the sacred tools given by Christ and the Holy Spirit to lead us to what is essential. Examples include the Bible, the church, rites and sacraments, creeds and doctrines, etc.

INCIDENTALS

Incidentals include customs, practices and polity.

Incidentals are specific customs in the church that can be changed according to time and circumstance. How we worship, how we serve communion, how we perform rites and sacraments, and how we govern our church are all examples of incidentals.

I. ESSENTIALS

The founders of the Ancient Unity had to explain why they rejected some teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and did not reject others. Later, Moravians had to explain why they were able to work with other Protestant churches while still remaining separate. They did this by defining some things as “essential” to the Christian faith (and other things as “ministerial” or “incidental”). They believed that without the “essential” things, a church cannot be a church, and if a church has these “essential” beliefs, it is a church even if it has practices and principles that are different from other churches. If we believe and live out these “essentials,” then we are Christians.

GOD’S PART- Essential Actions on the Part of the Divine: Create, Redeem, Sustain

CREATOR: God’s Good Will Towards Creation

The Nature of God

We think of God in various ways. We see God as the Creator, Ruler, and Preserver of all things (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17) as well as Spirit and Love (John 4:24; 1 John 4:16). We also describe God as eternal (Psalm 90:2). Our scriptures tell us that God never began and will never cease to exist. God is unchangeable—God’s existence does not vary (Malachi 3:6). We believe God is everywhere at all times (omnipresent) (Psalm 139:7-12) and that God is almighty (omnipotent). God has power to do whatever God wills (Daniel 4:35). We say God is all-knowing (omniscient) and all-wise. Nothing can be hidden from God; God’s judgments are always correct (Romans 11:33). We believe God is perfectly just and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:3-4; Psalm 36:6; Romans 3:25-26). Finally, one refrain that follows God throughout the scriptures describes God as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8).

Some Names and Images of God

We cannot fully comprehend or imagine God's being. Here are some biblical names and images offered by our spiritual ancestors that shed light on who God is:

- * Creator (Genesis 1:1; Job 38-39; Psalm 104; John 1:1-5)
- * Father (Matthew 6:9; Psalm 89:26; Jeremiah 3:19; Malachi 2:10; Romans 8:15)
- * Mother (Isaiah 66:13; Matthew 23:37; Hosea 11: 3-4; Deuteronomy 32:11-12; Isaiah 42:14; Isaiah 49:15; Psalm 131:2)
- * Lord (Yahweh/YHWH) (Exodus 3:14-15)
- * I Am (Exodus 3:14-15)
- * Shepherd (Psalm 23; Genesis 48:15; Psalm 28:9)
- * Savior/Redeemer (2 Samuel 22:3, 47; Psalm 89:26; Psalm 19:14; Isaiah 48:17)
- * King (Psalm 44:4; Psalm 47:7; Zechariah 14:9)
- * Righteous Judge (2 Timothy 4:8; Genesis 18:25)
- * Pillar of Cloud/Fire (Exodus 13:21; Exodus 40:34-35)
- * Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2)
- * Still, Small Voice (1 Kings 19:12)
- * Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18, 30,31; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 18:2, 31)
- * Refuge (Psalm 46:1; Psalm 91:2; Jeremiah 16:19)
- * Fortress (Psalm 46:7, 11; Psalm 91:2; Jeremiah 16:19)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *God of the Sparrow*, 462; *This is My Father's World*, 456; *As a Mother Holds Her Baby*, 659; *Your Majesty, How Vast It Is*, 471; *Praise We All Our God Eternal*, 637

God's Ongoing Care for Creation / Stewardship

It is in God's nature to continue to create, ✦redeem, and sustain this creation through people.

From the beginning, God has entrusted humans with responsibility to care for the creation (Genesis 1:28).

We deem it a sacred responsibility and genuine opportunity to be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us: our time, our talents, and our financial resources. We view all of life as a sacred trust to be used wisely (MCCL, #10).

God graciously partners with humanity to provide ongoing care for creation. People become God's stewards for the care of God's world (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6-9).

God's care for creation and humanity continues when people:

- * Love God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 22:37-39)
- * Love their neighbor (Leviticus 19:18b; Matthew 22:37-39)
- * Do justice (Micah 6:8)
- * Love mercy (Micah 6:8)
- * Walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)
- * Practice ✦Sabbath living (Exodus 20:8-12; Leviticus 23:3; 25:1-7)
- * Practice ethical ✦stewardship of resources (Matthew 25:34-40; Acts 4:32-35)
- * Practice God's ✦Shalom (Isaiah 32:16-20; Isaiah 65:21-25)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

See General Liturgy 4: Creation, p. 26

God Made Known to Us

People sense the Divine in some of the following ways:

- * Creation (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 8:38-39)
- * Scripture (2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 5:39-40; Hebrews 4:12)
- * ✦Jesus Christ (John 1:18; Colossians 2:2-3)
- * The Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17, 26; Romans 8:9)
- * God's ✦covenant (Genesis 9:8-12, Genesis 17:1-12; Exodus 20:1-17, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Luke 22:20)

In grace God called and chose the people of Israel and established with them a covenant: I will be your God and you will be my people. In that relationship they were to be freed from sin and become a blessing to all. Then God came to us in Jesus Christ and fulfilled that covenant for all people. Through Christ's life, death, and ♦resurrection, God made for us a new covenant of grace (MBW, Baptism ♦Liturgy).

- * The church (Ephesians 2:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

REDEEMER: The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

The Nature of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human in one person. As a human being, Jesus is able to sympathize with our life experiences (Hebrews 4:14-16) and identify with our needs. As God, Jesus is able to forgive our sins and provide the way to a relationship with God (Romans 3:23-24).

We believe and confess that God has revealed [God's self] once and for all in [God's] Son Jesus Christ; that our Lord has redeemed us with the whole of humanity by His death and His resurrection; and that there is no salvation apart from Him. We believe that He is present with us in the Word and the Sacrament; that He directs and unites us through His Spirit and thus forms us into a Church (GU, The Belief of the Church; #2).

Some Names and Images of Jesus Christ

- * Son of God (Matthew 3:17; 16:16; Mark 1:1; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 4:14)
- * Savior (Luke 2:11; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 4:14)
- * Lord (Mark 1:3; John 13:14; John 20:28; Philippians 2:11; Revelation 17:14)
- * ♦Master (Luke 8:24; Luke 17:13)
- * Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48)
- * Living Water (John 4:7-15)
- * Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14)
- * Light (John 1:1-6; John 8:12)
- * Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)
- * The Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
- * Teacher (Luke 18:18; John 13:13)

- * Friend of sinners (Luke 15:2)
- * ♦Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12)
- * Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14)
- * The Word (John 1:1-14)
- * Mother Bird (Matthew 23:37)
- * The Gate (John 10:7-10)
- * Emmanuel (Matthew 28:16-20)
- * Lamb of God (John 1:29; Revelation 5:12)
- * Messiah (Matthew 1:16; Mark 13:21)
- * The Vine (John 15:1-8)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *He Comes to Us as One Unknown*, 478; *God Sent His Son*, 706; *He Came Singing Love*, 580; *Faithful Christians, One and All*, 300; *He Has Arisen*, 357

Gospel Accounts of Jesus

The accounts of Jesus' life in the New Testament are called the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four accounts, from different perspectives, all tell the story of Jesus' teaching, ministry, life, death, and resurrection. In addition, we find the gospel message in the other books of the New Testament as they chronicle the development of the early church.

Jesus' Incarnation, Life, Ministry, Teachings, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension

Christianity is based on God becoming human (the ♦incarnation in the historical person of Jesus Christ). The person of Jesus is central to our faith: his birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ♦ascension. Without Jesus, there is no Christianity.

The person of Jesus is central to our faith: his birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Without Jesus, there is no Christianity.

The eternal Christ has always existed with the Creator (John 1). Christ became flesh and lived among us as Jesus. Jesus taught the way of God and served people, proclaiming the kingdom of God with many miracles (Matthew 4:23). He was executed on a cross, and three days later he was raised from death. He ♦ascended to heaven. Being assured of his return in both Scripture and historic Christian ♦creeds, we live in hope until he comes again.

In this spirit [the Unitas Fratrum] awaits the appearing of Jesus Christ, goes forward to meet its Lord with joy, and prays to be found ready when He comes (GU, conclusion).

Humanity and Sin

God created humanity in God's own image (Genesis 1:26), to glorify and enjoy God forever. We are created to be pure and sinless (Genesis 1:31). However, we lose this state by yielding to sin and disobeying the will of God (Genesis 2:16, 17; James 1:14, 15). Sin separates people from God, others, and even self (Genesis 3-4; Isaiah 59:2). All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

We tend to think of sin as specific acts of moral **transgression** (disobedience, wrongdoings, hurtful thoughts and words, the bad we do and the good we fail to do, etc.), but those are merely symptoms of a deeper human condition. We could call the specific acts sins, but the underlying condition is sin. Sin is both individual and corporate. It affects individual persons and resides in broad societal systems.

Understanding the seriousness of sin helps us to appreciate the importance of many other Christian teachings and practices, including the Incarnation, Christ's death and resurrection, the dual nature of Christ (fully divine, fully human), salvation, Christian growth, and discipleship. Sin is an inclination toward self and away from God. It is a force that holds people in its grasp and only God gives us the power to be freed from sin (Romans 6:1-23).

In the light of divine grace, we recognize ourselves to be a Church of sinners. We require forgiveness daily, and live only through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He redeems us from our isolation and unites us into a living Church of Jesus Christ (GU, The Belief of the Church, #2).

Redemption

In order to be released from the deeper, human condition of sin, we rely on the grace of God given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We call Jesus "Redeemer" because it is through him that we claim salvation which frees us from sin in this life and calls us into abundant life both now and forever.

*Lord God, our Father in heaven, you have shown your great love toward us by sending your Son into the world to be the atoning **sacrifice** for our sins (MBW, Lent 1, p. 72).*

This testimony [of Jesus Christ] calls each individual personally and leads each one to the recognition of sin and to the acceptance of the redemption achieved by Christ (GU #3).

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).

...to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (John 1:12).

While we still were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the center of the Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel, and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message (GU, #4).

SUSTAINER: The Presence of the Holy Spirit

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is fully God and has always existed as one with the Father and the Son. The Spirit was present at creation. The Spirit was present at the baptism and •temptation of Jesus. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to the •disciples as comforter, •advocate, and revealer of truth. The disciples experienced the fulfillment of Jesus' promise during the Jewish festival of •Pentecost in the form of wind and fire. The Holy Spirit unites us and forms us into a church. The Holy Spirit is God present with us now.

*The Holy Spirit is
God present with
us now.*

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who comes from the Father, and whom our Lord Jesus Christ sent, after he went away, to be with us forever, to comfort us as a mother comforts her children; to help us in our weakness and •intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; to bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God and teach us to cry, "Abba, Father;" to pour God's love into our hearts and make our bodies God's holy temple and to work in us the will of God, allotting gifts to each one individually, just as the Spirit chooses (MBW, Easter Morning Liturgy, p. 85).

Some Names and Images of the Holy Spirit

- * Wind (Genesis 1:2; Acts 2:1-4)
- * Breath of God (Genesis 2:7; John 20:22)
- * Dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10)
- * Advocate / Comforter / Encourager / Counselor (Paraclete) (John 14:16, 26; John 15:26; 16:7)
- * Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; John 15:26; John 16:13)
- * Guide (John 16:13)
- * Fire (Acts 2:1-4)
- * Spirit of Wisdom (Proverbs 8; Isaiah 11:2; Ephesians 1:17)

Moravian leader Zinzendorf referred to the Holy Spirit as a mother: “Christ’s Father is our dear father, and the Holy Spirit is our dear mother” (*Gemein-Reden*, Anhang, p. 3 [1748]). The Bible uses male and female images to describe the Spirit, as well as other images that do not connote gender.

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *Breathe On Me, Breath of God*, 494; *Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire*, 590; *Holy Spirit, Still Creating*, 496

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit prompts us to desire a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit assures us of our relationship with God and moves us to accept Christ’s gift of salvation. The Holy Spirit helps us continually discern God’s presence in our lives and the world.

The Holy Spirit convinces us that we have sinned and helps us to **repent**; the Holy Spirit directs us to call upon God for **pardon**. As the Holy Spirit assures us of our pardon, our lives become new every day. The Spirit also leads us to give ourselves to God and serve God (John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7-11).

We believe that by our own reason and strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to him; but that the Holy Spirit calls us through the gospel, enlightens us with gifts of grace, dedicates us to God, and preserves us in the true faith... (MBW, Easter Morning Liturgy, p. 85).

The Gifts of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit equips and empowers us, giving special abilities (gifts) to every believer for use in ministry, to build up the church. Some gifts are very prominent (e.g., preaching, teaching), and others are more “behind the scenes” (serving, helping, giving), but all are important and necessary (1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-11, 28-31; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:9-11). The gifts must be exercised with love (1 Corinthians 13). Because of their gifts, every Christian has a significant role to play in God’s work. No one is unimportant.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Spirit’s work in people’s lives produces a **+transformation** of character, making the person more and more like Christ (**+sanctification**). The results (fruit) of that transformation include character qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

For more, see the Liturgy for Pentecost and Spiritual Renewal, p. 95

Evidence of the Holy Spirit at Work Today

We see the Holy Spirit’s work through:

- * Assurance of forgiveness
- * Changed attitudes
- * Transformed lives
- * Love for God
- * Healing and forgiveness
- * Restored relationships
- * A heart for justice
- * Empowerment for service
- * Recognition of Christ in one another

Discerning the Leading of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit guides us individually and as a community through:

- * Individual and community study of Scripture
- * Prayer and meditation
- * Self-reflection/repentance
- * Consultation with people of faith
- * Preaching/teaching
- * Dreams, visions, and prophecy

THE TRINITY

Our Experience of the Trinity

God has eternally existed as one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible doesn't explain how there can be three in one and one in three, but it does affirm this reality. The disciples of Jesus did not have the Trinity explained to them, but they experienced it. They had always known God as their heavenly Father (Psalm 89:26; Jeremiah 3:19; Malachi 2:10). Then they followed Jesus and came to realize that he, too, was God. Then they received the presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit, and they recognized that this, too, was God. It was not three different Gods, but the same God known in three persons.

In the same way, the Moravian Essentials define God as three persons in one by the actions on the part of the Divine. God creates, God redeems, and God sustains.

We know God as Father, who seeks loving relationships with all whom God has created. Like a Mother, God has nurtured us all our days and has been near in time of trouble...

We know God as Jesus Christ, the Word who became a human being and lived among us, full of grace and truth...

*We know God as the Holy Spirit, who reveals the truth about God...
(MBW, Trinity Liturgy, p. 102-103).*

OUR PART - Essential Actions on the Part of Humanity: Faith, Love, and Hope

In encountering who God is and what God has done and is doing, we respond in faith, love, and hope. Most references list these as faith, hope, and love, based on the order given in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. For purposes of **theological** discussion, however, our Ancient Unity generally used the order of faith, love, and hope with faith relating to the past and present, love relating to the present, and hope relating to the future. It is the reality, not the order, that is most important.

*...remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ...
(1 Thessalonians 1:8).*

*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation...
(1 Thessalonians 5:8).*

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include *Join We All with One Accord*, 525 and *Come, Let Us All With Gladness Raise*, 519

FAITH

Nature of Faith

Faith in God is both an **individual** and a **corporate experience**. Most simply faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). We can find this faith in personal **revelation** and the reading of Scripture, but our faith is made stronger when we nurture that faith in community. It is the work of the church together to strengthen one another in belief and faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe many things about God (eternal, all-good, etc.), based upon God’s revelation. For this we seek information and guidance first from the scriptures, then from the historic creeds of the church (Apostles’, Nicene) and Moravian statements such as the Easter Morning Liturgy and the *Ground of the Unity*.

Faith is our response to God that involves personally giving ourselves, our lives, and our actions to God, acknowledging that we are totally dependent on the God who created and loves us (Hebrews 11:8; Galatians 2:20; John 1:12).

Faith is absolute trust and commitment to God's saving will fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8; Luke 7:1-10).

Faith is trusting and giving our all to God, even if our minds do not know and cannot comprehend all the details (Matthew 9:20-22; Romans 10:9).

Faith is based on God's revelation and not on what one wants to believe or is told to believe (2 Corinthians 5:7; Mark 9:23-24).

We grow in faith throughout our lives, sometimes leaping forward, sometimes falling back. We sustain and nurture each other in faith by being part of a church or Christian community.

Faith can be described as:

- * Believing in God's revealed presence
- * Depending on God
- * Committing to God's saving will
- * Reaching beyond our comprehension
- * Trusting God's faithfulness to humanity
- * Assurance of God's unchanging love
- * Learning with the head, growing with the heart, serving with the hands

Expressions of Faith

We submit ourselves to God and seek to follow God's will in all we say and do, with the assurance that God is true and faithful in all. We certainly want to learn all we can about God and God's actions, but ultimately faith is more of a relationship of absolute trust and commitment to God's saving will fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

By faith we come to know God as our loving Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. This deepening relationship will motivate us and guide our actions as we seek to live out our faith in community with others (John 17:3; John 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:37-39).

By faith we come to know God as our loving Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Through Scripture, prayer, worship, and service we nourish and strengthen our personal faith (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25).

We realize that our Christian faith must continually be nourished if it is to remain living and vital. Therefore, we desire to grow in our Christian lives through family devotions, personal prayer and study, and the opportunities for spiritual development offered by the Church (MCCL, paragraph 8).

We express our faith by obeying God and seeking to follow God in all we say and do (Romans 12:1-2).

Living in Faith

We live out our faith by:

- * Receiving Jesus Christ as Savior
- * Giving of ourselves, our lives and actions to God
- * Submitting to and seeking to follow God
- * Entering more deeply into the mystery of God
- * Studying Scripture
- * Praying unceasingly
- * Participating in worship
- * Serving others
- * Sharing faith with others

Some Examples and Images of Faith

- * People of faith (Genesis 12:1-9; Hebrews 11; Mark 9:15-26; Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 9:2-8)
- * The power of faith (Matthew 17:20; Luke 18:27)
- * The testing of faith (James 1:2-3)
- * Faith over human wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)
- * Faith in prayer (Matthew 21:22)
- * Faith leads to salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- * Faith as trust (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- * Faith informs what we do (James 2:14-17)
- * Faith protects us (Ephesians 6:16)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *My Life Flows On*, 701; *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, 460; *Faith Is a Living Power from Heaven*, 700

LOVE

Nature of Love

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends ... faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a, 13).

The supreme example of love is Jesus Christ. Through Christ's **•sacrificial love, •compassion**, forgiveness, and teachings, we see love in action (John 3:16). Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we know love as a living experience now and forever.

God's loving goodwill, put into action through Jesus Christ, calls us to respond in love. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Scripture calls this **•“agape”** [a GAH pay], a kind of love which seeks the best for humanity in the all-embracing love of God. Agape is loving the world for what it can and should be in relationship with God.

Love is:

- * Sacrificial
- * Selfless
- * Compassionate
- * Forgiving
- * Affirming
- * Reconciling
- * Healing
- * Inclusive

Expressions of Love

Building on our faith in God, our love for God leads us to worship and honor God. We are called to live as God intends for us to live, loving one another. Agape love is neither a feeling of friendship or companionship, nor is it a romantic attraction. Those feelings are part of God's gift of human experience to us. The love in which we respond to God's actions and care for us is the kind of love which serves others and the world (John 21:15-19).

We love all people as children of God, and love the world, also, as God's creation. Jesus says that we are to love even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44).

Jesus says that the two great commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor.

He said to them, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37-39).

Jesus commands that we serve each other in love as our response to God's love.

Jesus came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28).

We are called to follow Jesus in serving others. We pray, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to be shown the ways we can "reach out to our neighbors, opening our hearts and hands to them in their need" (GU, #9).

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Jesus taught that we should strive to settle any differences with others in a loving manner, and if needed, to have someone mediate disagreements to resolve conflict.

...we recognize the possibility of disagreements and differences. Often these differences enrich the Church, but sometimes they divide. We consider it to be our responsibility to demonstrate within the congregational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made us one (MCCL, paragraph 14).

Rather than divisiveness, our response and witness to God's love for us should be the "fruit of the Spirit," which, in contrast to divisiveness, is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a).

We recognize the danger of ♦self-righteousness and judging others without love (GU, #6).

Our love for God calls us to love one another as followers of Christ, to love all people as fellow children of God, and to love God's creation (1 John 4:20-21; 1 John 4:7-8). We are called to love the world that God so loved (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ maintains in love and faithfulness his commitment to this fallen world. Therefore we must remain concerned for this world. We may not withdraw from it through indifference, pride or fear. Together with the universal Christian Church, the Unitas

Fratrum challenges humanity with the message of the love of God, striving to promote the peace of the world and seeking to attain what is best for all (GU, #10).

This commandment encapsulates our response to God's loving will for all, which we are to reflect in our own relations and actions with one another.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Living in Love

We show that we live a life of love by:

- * Offering our gifts, time, and service on behalf of others
- * Putting another's good before our own
- * Letting go of hurt
- * Encouraging and building up one another
- * Making peace
- * Restoring to health
- * Welcoming all as created in the image of God

Some Examples and Images of Love

- * Sacrificial love (John 3:16-17)
- * Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 50:15-21)
- * Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- * Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1)
- * "Least of these" (Matthew 25:31-46)
- * Love your enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *Blessed Be the Tie That Binds*, 680; *Christian Hearts, in Love United*, 673 or *Heart with Loving Heart United*, 401; *Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love*, 577

HOPE

The Nature of Hope

Hope is knowing that God, who has acted for our salvation in the past, and is with us in the present, will continue to act to accomplish God's ultimate goodwill (1 Peter 1:3-9; Jeremiah 29:11).

Our hope is grounded in Jesus Christ. ("Jesus is my joy/therefore blessed am I/O his mercy is unbounded/all my hope on him is grounded..." ("Bliss Beyond Compare," MBW 594, v. 2)).

Our hope is a product of our faith. Faith makes it possible to have hope even when things might not appear to be hopeful. "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8:24-25).

Hope is confidence that love is stronger than death. We believe this life is not our only life, and as Moravians we say that upon death we have "entered into the more immediate presence of the Savior" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Our hope in the future informs and shapes our actions in the present. It gives us the assurance and the courage to act with boldness in this life (2 Corinthians 3:12). Hope completes us and directs us forward toward the ultimate fulfillment of God's ongoing action in our lives.

Hope is one of the characteristics of a living church. "A church is and remains a living one when it... awaits wholeheartedly the coming of its Lord as King" (COUF, Essential Features of the Unity, Chapter 1, #52g).

We view the future with hope because we believe that this is God's world and we trust that the one who creates, redeems, and sustains is still at work.

We have hope in the future because we have faith that is rooted in the past and love that is active in the present. Christian hope is grounded in God's eternal love for us and for creation, made present to us through the Holy Spirit. This hope is far more than optimism or wishing that things will somehow turn out right.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Hope is:

- * Grounded in faith
- * Trust in God's eternal love
- * Made present to us through the Holy Spirit
- * Able to •transcend our present circumstances
- * Confidence/courage for the future

Expressions of Hope

Our joy is an expression of our hope (Romans 12:12). Hope is what keeps us going in the dark and sleepless nights because we know the sun will rise again (Psalm 139: 7-12). Hope is what makes it possible to labor, day after day, in ministries of justice and mercy, knowing that such labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Hope is what lifts our eyes from our own pain and misery so that we can look into another's eyes with compassion. Hope is confidence that love is stronger than death and this life is not our only life. One way we express that is by gathering at the graveside for memorial and Easter morning services to affirm our living hope in resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 15:12-57).

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

For more, see the Easter Morning Liturgy, p. 87

Living in Hope

We show we live a life of hope by:

- * Seeking the possibility of good and blessing for all (Galatians 6:1-4)
- * Looking to the future with joy (John 15:9-17; Romans 15:13)
- * Acknowledging God's goodness in the midst of hurt and evil in the world (Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 3: 7-11)
- * Working to establish the will of God on earth (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19)
- * Recognizing the promises of God in a broken world (Hosea 14:4-7, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Isaiah 44:1-8)
- * Ushering in the household of God (Ephesians 2:19)

Some Examples and Images of Hope

- * Woman touching Jesus' garment (Luke 8:43-48)
- * Martha at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:24-27)
- * Jairus' request (Luke 8:40-56)
- * Hope in the midst of challenging times (Romans 5:1-5)
- * An unfading hope (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)
- * A living hope (1 Peter 1: 3-6)
- * An inspirational hope (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)
- * Hope in resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13)
- * The hope of glorification (Colossians 1:27)
- * Hope in Christ (Ephesians 1:8b-14)

We have hope in:

- * The resurrection
- * The Lord Jesus Christ
- * The grace that Jesus Christ brings
- * The promises of God
- * Our calling (as disciples, into ministries)
- * Glory (God's exceeding excellence)
- * Salvation
- * ♦Eternal life

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *Be Still, My Soul*, 757; *Good News! Our Christ Has Come!* 630; *I Do Not Know Tomorrow's Way*, 727; *People in Darkness Are Looking for Light*, 266; *Come, Let Us All with Gladness Raise*, 519

II. MINISTERIALS

The Ancient Unity distinguished between things that are essential to salvation and things that are helpful (ministerial) for salvation, and for living as a follower of Christ. Some things are called “ministerial” because they “minister” to the essentials and help people respond to God’s grace.

Ministerials are those things that God has given us so that we can attain the essentials. As stated earlier, the Ancient Unity identified two types of essentials: the essential works of God (as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer), and the ways we respond to God’s work (in faith, love, and hope). Ministerials are the means by which faith, love, and hope are kindled, cherished, and strengthened in us.

Ministerials have been called sacred tools given by Christ and the Holy Spirit to lead us to what is essential. They are sacred not in and of themselves, but because of the essential things to which they lead and direct us. For example, Scripture is “holy” because it reveals to us and points us to the One who is holy. In the 1500s the Moravian bishop Luke of Prague said that the Bible is “that first, greatest and most necessary ministerial thing.” A way to think about this: if all pastors were silenced, the churches were burned down and Bibles were banned, could one still be Christian? If so, then pastors, churches, and even the Bible are not essential to one’s relationship with God. This does not mean that they are not important or that they are not instruments that lead us into a relationship with Jesus Christ. It simply means that Bibles, churches, and pastors are not the relationship itself. Therefore they are considered ministerial instead of essential (from “In Essentials, Unity: Understanding the Essential Things” Craig Atwood, *The Moravian Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2014).

Other ministerials include the church, sacraments, rites, creeds, and doctrines.

THE BIBLE

The Bible is the most important ministerial because it tells us the story of God’s love for us, including the story of Jesus Christ. The Moravian Church has always looked to the Bible as the guide for our lives. The Bible has been translated into many languages so all people can read about God’s

love. It is not the literal words that are most important; it is the meaning of the stories in the Bible that lead us to the essentials.

We do not believe that Jesus points us to Scripture so that we can find the answers there, but rather that Scripture points us to Jesus so that we can find the answers in Him. (Faith & Order Commission, Guiding Principles of Biblical Interpretation, 2012).

Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds (Hebrews 1:1-2).

From *The Ground of the Unity, God's Word and Doctrine*:

The ♦Triune God as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only source of our life and salvation; and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith, of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life.

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the center of Holy Scriptures and of all preaching of the Gospel and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message. We ask our Lord for power never to stray from this.

The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine. In interpreting Scripture and in the communication of doctrine in the Church, we look to two millennia of ♦ecumenical Christian tradition in the wisdom of our Moravian forebears in the faith to guide us as we pray for fuller understanding and ever clearer proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own. It knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement. Also it is true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly.

From *The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living*, #3:

We decline to determine as binding what the scriptures have left undetermined, or to argue about mysteries impenetrable to human reason.

Origin of the Bible

The Bible is a collection of 66 ancient books, like a library; the word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means *books*. The Bible was written in a variety of ancient settings and came together over a long period of time. We believe this process of writing and compilation took place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) was written in Ancient Hebrew and is the story of the Israelites and their relationship with God. The later Christian scriptures (New Testament) were written in Ancient Greek and include the stories of Jesus and the early church. The Hebrew Bible contained law, prophecy, and writings that Jesus and his contemporaries considered sacred. The Hebrew Bible and the later Christian scriptures together form the present-day Bible.

This process of compiling the Bible extended over at least a thousand-year period, with early church leaders deciding which books were to be considered sacred and therefore included in the **•canon**. The Old Testament contains 39 books; the New Testament contains 27 books. Some traditions include additional ancient books known as the Apocrypha.

It is thought that some of the stories in the Old Testament were first shared orally more than 1500 years before Jesus. The first written words of the Old Testament may have been called “The Book of the Law,” perhaps written 600 years before Christ in the city of Jerusalem. This book has never been found, but it seems to form the basis of the book of Deuteronomy. About 500 years before Jesus, after the Israelites were released from captivity under the Babylonians (referred to as the Exile), the priests in Jerusalem collected early stories of Moses and the Exodus along with this “Book of the Law” to create the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible). The rest of the Old Testament (Israel’s national history, popular stories, prophecy, poems, prayers, and wisdom sayings) came together over time until about 150 years before Jesus, concluding with the formation of the book of Daniel.

The earliest writings in the New Testament are from the apostle Paul’s letters to the early churches. Archeologists have found a small fragment from the letter to the church in Thessalonica dated to around the year 52 CE. It is thought that the four Gospels (stories of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection) were written in four different locations over a span of years from about year 60 to year 100. Scholars believe the writer of the Gospel of Luke also wrote the book of Acts, which tells the history of the early church and is the first place we find the term *Christians* or *Christ followers*.

The book of Revelation is thought to be one of the latest books to be written and included in the New Testament. Athanasius, a priest in the year 367 CE, is the first to refer to all 27 books as “the New Testament.”

SUMMARY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

*Spoken history/stories passed
down generationally*



Written/revised documents



Manuscripts



Accepted Scripture (Canon)



Translations/versions

Types of Writing in the Bible

- * Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- * History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
- * Poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations
- * Major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
- * Minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- * Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- * History of the church: Acts
- * Epistles: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude
- * Apocalyptic: Revelation

Some Symbols and Images of the Bible

- * Lamp / light (Psalm 119:105)
- * Mirror (James 1:22-24)
- * Sword (Hebrews 4:12)
- * Hammer (Jeremiah 23:29)
- * Seed that is sown (Luke 8:11)
- * Gold (Psalm 19:10)
- * Honey (Psalm 19:10)
- * God breathed (2 Timothy 3:16)

IN THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

Related hymns include: *God's Word Alive and Active*, 503; *Jesus Loves Me! This I Know*, 726; *Break Now the Bread of Life*, 502; *The Word of God, Which Ne'er Shall Cease*, 509

How Moravians Interpret the Bible

From *The Guiding Principles for Biblical Interpretation* (Unity Committee on Theology, February 2017):

- * Jesus Christ is central to our faith; all biblical interpretation must stand in light of the teachings and example of Christ.
- * Prayer and meditation is an integral part of interpreting the Bible. We test our biblical interpretations by living them out in our daily life.
- * We proceed in our reading of the Bible with openness, not presuming the best interpretation in advance; through the Holy Spirit our reading of the Bible may surprise us, giving us new insights we did not expect.
- * A shared search for scriptural truth will enhance and strengthen our relationship with Christ and our Christian fellowship.
- * We will be patient with different views on the biblical text as long as they draw us closer to the Triune God.
- * Some parts of Scripture are clear and some are mysterious.
- * The best interpretations of a passage should be understood in light of the Bible as a whole.
- * Interpretations should strengthen our faith, make sense to our mind, guide our hearts, and form our actions.
- * As much as possible, interpretations should take into account the historical situation of the first writer, the editors, audience, and context.
- * We should be aware of how our worldview, cultural situation, and social context influence our interpretation of the Bible.
- * Our interpretation of the Bible is often enhanced by Bible study and learning together with others.
- * These guiding principles for the process of biblical interpretation may be of use in the Moravian world as we seek to draw closer to God, to one another, and to our neighbors.
- * It is a principle in the Moravian Church that when interpreting Scripture we employ grace, patience, and understanding, keeping fellowship with all believers.

See also *Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of Scripture From a Moravian Context*, Faith & Order Commission, 2013

THE CHURCH

We often think of the church as a physical building; however, it is much more than that. There is a difference between “going to church” and “being the church.”

Beginning in the earliest days of his ministry, Jesus called his followers to live in a community of love, accepting one another as sisters and brothers in the family of God. During the Jewish festival of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection, God’s Spirit empowered the community of his disciples for even greater love and service to others. We often refer to this extraordinary event as the birth of the church.

We find the following principles in the *Ground of the Unity*, paragraphs 1-3, 11: Jesus Christ continues to call the church into being so we may serve him on earth until he comes. With his followers around the world, we believe Christ is present as the church gathers to celebrate the Holy Communion, to experience the water of baptism, and to share the reading, hearing, preaching, and teaching of Scripture. Christ continues to guide and unite the church through his spiritual presence. We hear Christ’s call to follow, and we pray to be used for his service. In this way, we become his physical presence, his body in the world today, offering Christ’s love to one another and to our neighbors. The head of the church is Jesus Christ (Chief Elder), whom we embrace as Lord, the highest authority of the church and our lives.

The good news of God’s love in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit empowers the church to be a community in which each person can experience God’s forgiveness of sin. Through the forgiveness of our harmful and destructive thoughts and actions, the life of the church is renewed daily.

The church is full of life when it:

- * Listens carefully for God’s word
- * Confesses its sin and accepts forgiveness
- * Seeks and maintains fellowship with Christ
- * Places its whole life under God’s rule and leading
- * Serves its neighbors
- * Seeks fellowship with all who embrace Jesus as Lord
- * Reflects the Spirit of Christ in all its relationships, including relationships with people of other faiths

JESUS CHRIST AS “CHIEF ELDER”

On September 16, 1741, the Renewed Moravian Church recognized that only Jesus Christ could be the highest authority of the church, not any one person. This was celebrated on November 13, 1741, and continues to be celebrated annually in the Moravian Church.

- * Proclaims the Good News of the Savior to the world
- * Looks forward with all its heart to the future coming of Christ

(adapted from *Ground of the Unity*, Essential Features of the Unity)

Beyond the Moravian Church, we have fellowship with children of God in other faith communities, and we cooperate with other churches to expand the reach of God's forgiveness and love. We are grateful for the gifts other faith communities offer for the enrichment of the Moravian Church.

Some Symbols and Images of the Church/God's People

- * Covenant people (Genesis 9:9-17)
- * Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7)
- * Flock (John 10:1-18; Isaiah 40:11)
- * Disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)
- * Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)
- * Family of God (Galatians 4:4-7)
- * Royal ♦priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)

Characteristics/Functions of the Church

- * The church is a community where we experience relationship with the Triune God and one another.
- * The church provides a place of fellowship for people to be one in the Lord despite differences such as gender, sexuality, wealth, ethnicity, or physical and mental ability. (See Galatians 3:28)
- * The church teaches people to be empathetic and embrace differences while seeking unity:

Recognizing the possibility of disagreements or differences, it is the church's responsibility to demonstrate within its congregational and denominational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made us one. How well the church accomplishes this will be a witness to our community as to the validity of our faith (MCCL, Personal Relationships).

- * The church shares the Gospel and is a servant in the world as Christ was a servant to the world (Matthew 28:16-20; Matthew 25:31-46).
- * The church has a ♦prophetic role (Isaiah 1:17; Zechariah 7:9-10; Proverbs 31:8-9; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:1-11; Matthew 23:1-36; Luke 6: 20-36).

The Moravian Church is a church grounded in mission to the world. We find hope where others may not. We have an implicitly prophetic calling to usher in the will of God on earth by acting together to confront injustice and the dehumanization of people. We do this by engaging in actions such as dismantling systemic racism, caring and advocating for the poor, and welcoming “outsiders” (i.e., immigrant, marginalized, stranger, those who are “different”).

Too often we fall short of this call, seeing differences as cause for fear rather than for celebration. Instead of caring for the tapestry, we unravel the fabric of your design. We perpetuate divisions by race and color, culture, class, and gender (MBW Liturgy of Celebration, p. 45).

The Church shares the Gospel and is a servant in the world as Christ was a servant to the world.

From *The Unity Mission Agreement: Moravian Church Mission in a Time of Globalization* (Cape Town, 2017):

It can be tempting to retreat from the challenges, but mission has been at the heart of the Moravian Church since its renewal in Herrnhut in 1727. Moravians were called to go to the despised, rejected, and frightened people in the margins of the world to share their lives to show them Christ’s love. “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10). Moravians still believe that no one on this earth is God-forsaken; all people are made in the image of God.

Missionaries today are sent to overcome barriers of race, class, and gender. It is our mission to speak out wherever barriers divide humanity and harm our brothers and sisters. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). Following the example of Christ, we Moravians strive to overcome the barriers which exclude people and God’s creation from living a sustainable life in peace and dignity, such as racism, power imbalances, and poverty or climate injustice.

Our goal as Moravians in mission is simply to do the work of Christ in this world. We follow the One who came into the world to give life in abundance to all. We embrace our calling and mission with joy and hope because this mission brings us ever closer to our Savior and the reign of God on earth.

Discipleship

Our primary call as Christians is to be followers of Jesus in all areas of life. Therefore, as a living church, we will and must meet the demands the world places upon us to serve the spiritual, social, physical, and economic needs of our neighbors.

Our discipleship is expressed as we:

- * Preach the love of Christ
- * Teach his way of compassion in a competitive and often hostile world
- * Build relationships across social boundaries
- * Create fellowship with our neighbors
- * Welcome those new to our communities and congregations
- * Walk with people suffering physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- * Tell the story of the Cross
- * Celebrate the resurrection
- * Offer the gift of eternal life
- * Forgive those who do us wrong
- * Share the concerns of people treated unfairly
- * Work for peace
- * Listen to another's pain
- * Seek out the isolated
- * Care for the sick
- * Comfort the dying
- * Invite others into a life of discipleship

By the work of the Holy Spirit, we grow to understand Jesus more fully and allow Christ to guide our lives day by day. The goal of our discipleship is to become more like him in our thoughts, words, and actions by serving others and sharing his love (Mark 10:42-45). We seek to become disciples who make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

The church nurtures Christian disciples by encouraging:

- * Personal prayer and study
- * Spiritual formation opportunities
- * Faithful worship attendance
- * Faithful participation in the Lord's Supper
- * Active participation in Christ's church, serving God all the days of our lives

- * Contribution of time, talent, and treasure as good stewards
- * Service through mission and outreach
- * Authentic witness to Christ in our relationships and community life

More than a Sunday morning activity, worship is an attitude of our hearts that seeks to honor and glorify God in all of life, every day.

Worship

Worship is offering “worth-ship” to God. It involves declaring who God is and what God has done (Psalm 96:3).

Worship is declaring God’s worthiness (worth). It is a vital activity for us as humans. Because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), we have a natural desire to know God. As God is revealed to us, our natural and appropriate response is worship (Romans 12:1). Genuine worship of God also moves us to be concerned with justice and mercy, righteousness and grace, holiness and faith (Micah 6:6-8).

As people of faith, believers come together in devotion to worship God because God has touched our lives and invites us to be part of God’s kingdom. In worship, God encourages us to renewed dedication to service in the world (*Our Moravian Treasures*, p. 121; COUF #667).

The Moravian Church has a rich variety of worship forms that reflect our common devotion to God (*Our Moravian Treasures*, p. 121).

The essence and the soul of our worship services is not to be found in the form, beautiful and attractive as that should ever be, but rather in the religion of the heart, which is expressed in the form. (Northern Province Book of Order 1073; Southern Province Book of Order Chapter 7).

The congregation has an active part in all worship (COUF #668).

In our worship services we observe the church year, celebrating the events in the life of Jesus from Advent and Christmas, through Easter to Pentecost.

Worship includes:

- * Our response through confession of sin, receiving the word of absolution, and offering our gifts
- * Listening to the Word of God
- * Sharing the sacraments
- * Singing
- * Praying
- * Other forms of **•liturgical** expression such as art, dance, drama, and readings

More than a Sunday morning activity, worship is an attitude of our hearts that seeks to honor and glorify God in all of life, every day. For instance, in worship we recognize God's hand in creation and respond with praise. We seek God's help when facing a challenging situation. We yield our will to God. All of this is worship. We offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices—"this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1-2).

SACRAMENTS AND RITES

In addition to leading worship and teaching discipleship, the church takes part in certain rituals that have a long tradition in the life of the church. These rituals are considered either sacraments or rites and are shared by all Moravian churches.

Sacraments

The two sacraments practiced by the Moravian Church are baptism and Holy Communion. Sacraments are specific actions through which the Holy Spirit imparts the blessings of God's promises to believers. They were instituted by Christ who told his followers to observe them. Sacraments use visible signs (water, bread, wine/juice) to symbolize God's invisible grace.

Baptism

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted baptism as the visible means of entry into the new covenant.

Baptism is a gift of God. In this sacrament, through grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ, are cleansed by his saving work, enter into the fellowship of the church, and are called to a life of faith and willing obedience (MBW, p. 165).

Baptism is an expression of God's covenant between God and the people of God. It is based on God's promise and received through the faith of the individual or their parents.

The water of baptism is richly symbolic, reminding us of: cleansing, new life, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, among other things. Baptism is the means by which a person enters the fellowship of the church. There is a communal aspect of baptism in which the church welcomes the baptized and accepts responsibility to "love and nurture them in Christ" (MBW, p. 166).

The baptism of children is a reminder of God's promise to be in covenant relationship with the child, and anticipates the child coming to faith and confirming that relationship in

Sacraments use visible signs (water, bread, wine/juice) to symbolize God's invisible grace.

the rite of confirmation. The baptism of a child reminds us that God's love precedes any act of faith on our part. In adult baptism, God's promise and its reception by faith occur at the same time. In the Moravian church in North America, baptism is customarily done by sprinkling or pouring.

We are baptized into the death of Jesus and we acknowledge that we "were buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glorious power of God Almighty, we too might be raised to live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4; MBW, p. 165). The newly baptized person is charged to "live, yet not you alone, but Christ live in you: and the life which you live now, live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave his life for you" (Galatians 2:20; MBW, p. 168).

Biblical references to baptism include:

- * Go and make disciples: Matthew 28:16-20
- * Baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ: Romans 6:3-4
- * Baptism for the forgiveness of sin: Acts 2:38-39

Holy Communion

Like baptism, Holy Communion is a gift from God. In its physical elements instituted by Christ (bread and wine) become a means of experiencing God's grace in a special way when received in faith. "In the celebration of this Sacrament we receive the renewed assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, and of our fellowship with Christ; unite with one another as members of His Body; and rejoice in the hope of His return in glory" (MCCL, #18). So as we commune, we thus "renew our pledge of allegiance to Him" (MCCL, #18). Holy Communion reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for us in the past. It affirms Christ's presence with us in the present, and it strengthens us to continue in faith and hope "until he comes."

Holy Communion connects us to the body of Christ.

Holy Communion is known by several names. As "Communion," it reminds us of the union it brings us with God and other Christians, past and present, near and far. As "the Lord's Supper," it recalls the meal at which our Lord instituted the sacrament. As "the Eucharist" (from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving), it is an expression of our thanks for all God does for us in our Savior Jesus Christ.

As a matter of principle, the Moravian Church maintains an "open Communion," welcoming the presence and participation of members of other Christian churches in the celebration of the Sacrament (COUE, #669).

Since we believe Holy Communion is a gift of God's grace, it is intended for Christians of all denominations. It is the Lord's Table, not our own.

Baptized children, on request of parents and after instruction by the Church as to the meaning and value of the Holy Communion, according to age level, may be admitted to Holy Communion (COUE, #670).

Biblical references to Holy Communion include:

- * Jesus at the Last Supper: Matthew 26:26-29
- * Paul's teaching on the Last Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Rites of the Church

The rites of the church (confirmation, **ordination**, marriage, and memorial/burial service) are important liturgical actions by which participants affirm their Christian faith and dedicate themselves to a life consistent with that faith.

Confirmation

When a person baptized as a child is ready to publicly profess faith in Christ and accept the responsibilities of church membership, they reaffirm their baptism through the rite of confirmation. Confirmation is an expression of a personal commitment to Christ and to the Christian life. In the rite of confirmation, after a period of study and personal reflection, confirmands are asked to profess their faith by affirming the following questions:

Confirmation is an expression of a personal commitment to Christ and to the Christian life.

- * Do you believe in God as your loving Creator, in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Comforter and Sustainer, according to the Holy Scriptures?
- * Do you in this faith turn away from sin, evil, and selfishness in your thoughts, words, and actions, and do you intend to participate actively in Christ's church, serving God all the days of your life? (MBW, p. 170-71)

The congregation is also invited to affirm the confirmands' public profession of faith by pledging their love and continued nurture of them in Christ's community.

In this rite, one becomes a confirmed communicant member of the Moravian Church. (Those who are baptized as adults become confirmed communicant members through their baptism.)

Ordination

Christian ministry is the work of God through the whole church, exercised by all the people of God. Within that ministry of God's people, some are called and set apart for specific ministry through ordination. Ordination recognizes, authorizes, commissions, and empowers the person being **ordained** for a ministry of preaching, teaching, baptizing, and serving Holy Communion (Word and Sacrament). The ordained person is accountable to God and the denomination. The purpose of ordained ministry is to prepare, support, and equip all Christians in their service of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Christian ministry is the work of God through the whole church, exercised by all the people of God.

In the Moravian Church, there are three orders of ministry: deacon, presbyter, and bishop. Unlike many other denominations, Moravian bishops are not administrators. Rather, they are pastors of pastors, and are looked to for theological wisdom. Ordination does not change a person's status before God or people. Rather, it defines the person's role or function in serving the church. That is, ordination affects what the minister does, not who the minister is (based on *For the Service of God and the Good Order of the Church*, Faith & Order Commission, 2003).

Marriage

Christian marriage is more than just a civil union of two people. It is a covenant with God and one another, a holy relationship. Therefore, "Christians should be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, love one another, be faithful to one another, bear one another's weaknesses and limitations, forgive one another, cherish one another in joy and sorrow, pray for and encourage one another in all things, and live together as heirs of the grace of life" (MBW, p. 175).

Christian marriage is more than just a civil union of two people. It is a covenant with God and one another, a holy relationship.

The people being married commit themselves to one another before God to be loving and faithful to one another, in good times and bad, for the rest of their lives. Therefore marriage should be entered into "discreetly, thoughtfully, and with reverence for God" (MBW, p. 175).

Memorial Service and Burial

A memorial service is a rite of the church that celebrates the life of a person who has died and gives thanks for the promise of eternal life with God. Memorial services where the body of the deceased is present can also be called funerals. There are also services where the remains of the body are absent. Both are considered memorial services in the Moravian Church. At Moravian memorial services, “it is characteristic [for the Moravian Church] that this moment of farewell and mourning includes giving thanks to God for the life of the deceased and is marked by confident hope in the resurrection” (*Our Moravian Treasures*, p. 136).

A particular custom for some Moravian memorial services is the sharing of a **spiritual memoir** (*Lebenslauf*) of the deceased. Many Moravian memorial services lift up God’s work in and through the life of the deceased as a witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moravians do this as a reflection of our belief that the Holy Spirit works through each one of us to offer the hope of eternal life through Christ.

Moravians often describe death as “entering the more immediate presence of the Savior” or “being called home.” We believe that our relationship with God and each other is primary. As followers of Christ, we believe that life here on earth has its own worth and dignity, just as Jesus’ earthly life did. Like Jesus, our relationship with God continues after death in a fullness we do not know here on earth. We believe that we will be in the direct presence of God and we will still have a personal existence. The apostle Paul speaks of a “resurrection body,” but does not give specific details (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). We profess faith in this resurrection promise in our Easter Morning liturgy by proclaiming:

We shall never taste eternal death, but shall attain the resurrection of the dead, for this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. Thus our bodies rest in hope (MBW, p. 87).

We trust that God will take care of the details of eternal life, and that we are called by grace to live in gratitude for God’s love at all times (*This We Most Certainly Believe*, p. 46-47).

CREEDS AND DOCTRINES

What is a Creed?

The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning “I believe.” The creeds represent our understanding of God, the church, and Christian life. Creeds are statements of faith and express our hope in the Triune God. Many of the creeds found in our *Moravian Book of Worship* begin with the pronoun “we” as an expression of the corporate and interdependent nature of the body of Christ. Creeds represent specific statements that embody the faith as well as the specific concerns of the church in historic times and places. They are responses of faith that strive to express, in words, our understanding of God’s actions from the perspective of human experience.

The creeds represent our understanding of God, the church, and Christian life.

The *Ground of the Unity* states that the “Unitas Fratrum recognizes in the creeds of the church the thankful action of the Body of Christ.” The provinces of the Renewed Unitas Fratrum understand several creeds to be important because in them the main doctrines of the Christian faith find clear and simple expression. For examples see the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Confession of the Unity of the Brethren of 1535, and the Shorter Catechism of Martin Luther. (For a more comprehensive list, see *The Ground of the Unity*.)

These creeds aid the Church in formulating a Scriptural confession, in marking the boundary of Christian belief, and in calling and holding believers to an obedient and fearless testimony in every age. The Unitas Fratrum maintains that all creeds formulated by the Christian Church stand in need of constant testing in light of the Holy Scriptures. It acknowledges as true professions of faith the early Christian witness: ‘Jesus Christ is Lord!’ and also especially the ancient Christian creeds and the fundamental creeds of the Reformation (GU, Creeds and Confessions).

What is a Doctrine?

Doctrines are defined truths about important Christian teachings, discerned and proclaimed by the church. They provide a guide for helping us form convictions and understand certain truths of Christian belief.

The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine. In interpreting Scripture and in the communication of doctrine in the church, we look to two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and wisdom of our Moravian forbearers in the faith to guide us as we pray for fuller understanding and ever clearer proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But just as the Bible does not contain a doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own. The Unitas Fratrum knows the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement. It is also true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly (GU, #4).

For a broad understanding of what the Moravian Church believes about significant Christian teachings, see the Easter Morning liturgy in the MBW.

III. INCIDENTALS

The Ancient Unity distinguished between things that are essential to salvation, things that are important (ministerial) for salvation, and things that are helpful for individuals and congregations but are not required for the whole church to do in the same way. Those things that are not considered essentials or ministerials are called “incidentals.”

Incidentals include the ways in which we do some of the ministerial things. Incidentals can vary over time and from place to place. There is also much diversity in the incidentals throughout the worldwide Moravian Unity. Incidentals are specific customs in the church that can be changed according to time and circumstance.

Incidentals are specific customs in the church that can be changed according to time and circumstance.

Incidentals can be a beautiful reflection of the diversity within the church, but they should never prevent us from focusing on what is essential.

Relationship Between Ministerials and Incidentals

- * The Bible is a ministerial; the question regarding which particular translation we use or the question of which scripture readings are used in worship are incidentals.
- * The church is a ministerial; the place, the day or time of worship, what we do in a service, the use of hymn books, or the way we serve the community are incidentals.
- * Holy Communion is a ministerial; the way the sacrament is served, the type of bread or cup that is used, how often it is served, vestments that may or may not be used, the hymns that are sung, etc., are all incidentals.
- * Baptism is a ministerial; the mode of baptism, the age at which one is baptized, the participation of godparents or sponsors, and whether by sprinkling, pouring or immersion are incidentals.
- * Confirmation is a ministerial; the age when someone is confirmed and the dress of the confirmands are incidentals.
- * Marriage is a ministerial; the age when someone is getting married, the order of worship for marriage, the presence of witnesses, and the choice of partner are incidentals.

- * Ordination is a ministerial; time and place of ordination, the order of worship, wearing surplices, and the gender of the ordinand are incidentals.
- * Memorial service and burial are ministerials; time and place of the service, the use of a memoir, and the presence of a body are incidentals.
- * Some more examples of incidentals are our particular customs and traditions, such as lovefeasts, candle vigils, and watchnight services.

Biblical Examples of Incidentals

As believers, we recognize unity and oneness in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3-6) over the particularities in the practice of worship. We recognize that new ideas and divine inspiration may come from people and situations that we do not expect (Numbers 11:26-30). Even in the face of long-held traditions and practices, we understand that God may call us to do new things (Acts 10-11). We understand that worship can happen outside the walls of the church or sanctuary (John 4:19-24). Just as the ancient Israelites and the new followers of Christ grew and changed in their expression of faith and worship, so do we today.

CONCLUSION

This catechism has been written as a resource for learning in the Moravian Church in North America. In referencing the work of Luke of Prague, the concept of Essentials, Ministerials, and Incidentals frames our theological and doctrinal understanding of God's grace and the human response to God's grace.

This catechism concludes with the verse of Scripture used at the conclusion of the *Catechism of the Moravian Church in North America* printed in 1956:

So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:10-11, New Living Translation).

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GU—*The Ground of the Unity: A Doctrinal Statement Adopted by the Unity Synod of the Unitas Fratrum, or Moravian Church, Held at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, August 13 to 25, 1995.* Also in COUF, 15-19, and on www.unitasfratrum.org.

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MBW—*Moravian Book of Worship.* Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1995.

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GLOSSARY

Advocate – (Noun) – Another name for the Holy Spirit, as one who acts on behalf of humanity before God

Agape – A Greek word for self-giving love that prioritizes love for others over love for self (see p. 19). The word can also apply to a shared meal to celebrate fellowship and this self-giving love in the context of community. Moravians may refer to this meal as a “lovefeast.”

Ancient Unity – Name used to refer to the *Unitas Fratrum* (translated Unity of the Brethren), known today in North America as The Moravian Church, as it first began in Bohemia in 1457.

Ascension/Ascended – Rising up; referring to Jesus’ rising up to heaven after his resurrection

Canon – An authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture by foundational Christian councils. The specific list varies among different traditions of the Christian faith.

Compassion – Awareness and sympathy of the distress of others and the desire to help them in their distress.

Covenant – A sacred promise between God and humanity (and between humanity and God) that defines the relationship; it can also define a relationship between two people as in, but not limited to, marriage.

Creed – From the Latin word *credo* meaning “I believe.” A creed is a brief, authoritative statement of faith (some examples from the Moravian Book of Worship are the Apostles and Nicene creeds).

Curriculum – Educational materials used for instruction.

Denominations – Church congregations that are identified as one body, based on individual practices and beliefs, that all fit into the larger church tradition of Christianity. For example, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Lutherans, Moravians, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Quakers, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Baptists, United Methodists, etc. are separate denominations but are all Christian traditions.

Disciples – Those who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ in their lives and who share those teachings with others, so that they might also follow Jesus.

Doctrine – The official position of the church on a matter of belief.

Ecumenical – Unity or cooperation between Christian churches of different traditions or denominations.

Eternal Life – Jesus’ promise to all believers of everlasting life in fellowship with God, both now and after death.

Guiding Principle – A belief that is used to guide the actions and thoughts of one’s life and the larger community of believers.

Incarnation – To become flesh and blood; Christians use this term to refer to God becoming human in the person of Jesus.

Individual and Corporate Experience (of faith) – Humanity can experience faith as individual belief/conviction, and together as a community of believers. The church together as “corporate” becomes Christ’s physical presence in the world, offering Christ’s love in community and to our neighbors. Corporate comes from the word *corpus* meaning “body.”

Intercede – To mediate or intervene between people (or between God and humanity) to reconcile differences.

Jesus Christ – The title of *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah* meaning “the Anointed.”

Liturgy/Liturgical – Prayers, hymns, rites, and rituals a congregation uses for worship.

Master – This title for Jesus meant *teacher* in the time that it was used. In our North American history, and in some instances in the Bible, *Master* was used to indicate a slave owner. That is not the context in which Jesus’ disciples used this title.

Ordination/Ordained – To give religious authority within a faith community to teach, preach, and administer rites and sacraments. This is a specific ministry in the church with specific recognition and training, but not of greater importance than other ministries of the church. Ordained persons are often referred to as pastors, ministers, or clergy.

Pardon – Forgiveness of wrongdoing or offense without a penalty.

Pentecost – The Jewish festival of Shavout, also called Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of First Fruits. The Christian festival of Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church in Jerusalem.

Persecute – To treat someone with hostility because of race, political, or religious beliefs.

Polity – The form of government (constitution) of a religious group, in this case the Moravian Church of North America, written in a Book of Order.

Priesthood of All Believers – The belief that all Christians have equal access to God (not just clergy or “priests”) and can minister to one another and serve God in the world.

Prophetic – Sharing a vision of how God is calling humanity to be in relationship with God and each other.

Redeem (redemption) – To free from the consequences of sin through “purchase” or sacrifice for another; to be restored to wholeness.

Redeemer – A name for Jesus, who freed humanity from sin.

Repent – To turn away from sin and let God change one’s life.

Resurrection – To be raised from the dead; in the Christian tradition it is used as a word for “new life” or “transformation.” We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and that Christians are promised to be raised from death to eternal life with God.

Revelation – An act of revealing or communicating divine truth.

Rites – Important liturgical actions by which participants affirm their Christian faith and dedicate themselves to a life consistent with that faith.

Sabbath – A time of renewal/rest and worship; Christians practice a weekly day of sabbath.

Sacraments – Specific actions through which the Holy Spirit imparts the blessings of God’s promises to believers. They were instituted by Christ who told his followers to observe them. They use visible signs (water, bread, wine/juice) to symbolize God’s invisible grace.

Sacrifice/Sacrificial – The surrender or destruction of something/ someone for the sake of someone else, often referring to an act of offering something precious to God.

Salvation – The work of Christ to deliver (heal) humanity from the power of sin and death, and to be set free for fullness of life.

Sanctification – When a Christian disciple grows in God’s grace and faithful living to become more Christ-like.

Self-Righteousness – Conviction that one’s own actions and beliefs are more faithful, or righteous, than those of others.

Shalom – The Hebrew word *shalom* is often translated “peace.” It comes from the Hebrew root for “wholeness” or “completeness.” It denotes a physical or spiritual state of well-being, tranquility, prosperity, and security. It can be felt by individuals or communities. Shalom is a blessing, a manifestation of divine grace or blessed harmony (Isaiah 32:16-20).

Spiritual Memoir (*Lebenslauf*) – A record of a person’s journey of faith (where they have experienced God working in their life).

Stewardship – The careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.

Suffering Servant – This title for Jesus refers to his complete obedience to God and selfless suffering for the sake of others. In Jesus’ time a *servant* referred to one in the position of a slave. It is used, in our understanding, to indicate that he was one who served others to the point of his own suffering, but not in the context of the institution of slavery. Our use of the term today does not imply acceptance of the institution of slavery in any form.

Temptation – Being lured or luring another to do wrong, with promise of personal pleasure or gain.

Theology/Theological – The study of God and God’s relation to the world.

Theologian – A person who studies theology.

Transcend – To overcome or go beyond the limits of one’s situation.

Transformation – To change or convert in character or condition.

Transgression – An act or violation of laws or duties or relationships (i.e., sin).

Triune God – A title we give to God in reference to the Trinity; refers to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Unitas Fratrum – Literally “Unity of the Brethren,” the official name for the worldwide Moravian Church.

Worldwide Unity – The global Moravian Church which works together as one body to determine official church doctrine.

NOTES

NOTES



THE MORAVIAN CHURCH

The Northern Province · The Southern Province

Produced by the Interprovincial Board of Communication, Moravian Church in America
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania · Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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